

Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF)

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BOOK OF SORROWS

The Impact of Tobacco Abuse - Personal Stories and Testimonies



APIAHF

ASIAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER TOBACCO EDUCATION NETWORK

ASIAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER AMERICAN HEALTH FORUM

The Asian & Pacific Islander Tobacco Education Network (APITEN) was established in 1991, as a response to a call from the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community to coordinate tobacco control efforts for the community in California. Since its inception, APITEN has strived to counteract the factors that contribute to high smoking levels in AAPI communities through training, technical assistance, information dissemination, infrastructure development, and capacity building.

In 2003, APITEN began the implementation of the Statewide Advocacy Campaign which focused on efforts to build the capacity of AAPI communities to develop media advocacy skills and culturally effective anti-tobacco media messages. The campaign aimed to increase the reach to AAPI communities and shift the cultural norm - *tobacco abuse is unacceptable in AAPI communities*.

The Book of Sorrows is a compilation of personal stories and testimonies of the impact of tobacco abuse on AAPI communities, especially for families. This book is intended to be shared with community leaders, family members, and policymakers. The individuals contributing to this book have done so in hopes that it will drive AAPI communities to promote a healthier lifestyle and understand the *real* impact of tobacco abuse.

This book is dedicated to those that have lost loved ones due to tobacco abuse, who continue to fight the Tobacco Industry, and advocate for healthier and tobacco free Asian American and Pacific Islander communities.

ABOUT THE ASIAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER AMERICAN HEALTH FORUM (APIAHF)



The Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF) is a national advocacy organization dedicated to promoting policy, program, and research efforts to improve the health and well-being of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities. APIAHF's mission is to enable AAPIs to attain the highest possible level of health and well-being. APIAHF approaches activities with the philosophy of coalition building and developing communities. Founded in 1986, the APIAHF has formed partnerships with grassroots organizations, joined coalitions, and initiated networks to build community capacity and leadership skills, thereby ensuring a coordinated movement to achieve success, quality, and improvements in health for all of our constituents.

APIAHF houses the Asian & Pacific Islander Tobacco Education Network (APITEN), which is a statewide program funded by the California Department of Health Services, Tobacco Control Section (CDHS/TCS). At the time of printing, the APITEN program operated in a consortium model with Consortium Partners in Central Valley (California Health Collaborative), Los Angeles (Asian Pacific Health Care Venture), and San Diego (Union of Pan Asian Communities) to implement tobacco control activities in local AAPI communities. Starting in July 2004, the APITEN Program will be referred to the AAPI Partnership Program. For more information on the AAPI Partnership activities or technical assistance and training services, please contact the APIAHF Chronic Diseases Program at (415) 954-9988.

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I started smoking when I started college. I was away from home and it was just one of those times in life that I was experimenting. I was away from my parents and I felt like an actual adult, so I thought. I had met some foreign students my first semester and they all smoked. Naturally, to fit in I smoked too. It never felt like there was anything wrong about it around these guys. It seemed natural to them. We lit up anywhere. I guess over in their home countries, it wasn't a big deal. Not like here in the U.S. where you're always getting messages (commercials, billboards, etc) about how bad it is. I should have known better. "C'est la vie." At any rate, I continued smoking for the next four years. I got to the point where I could almost finish a pack and a half of cigarettes a day. It definitely became an addiction and a vice. During times of stress I would smoke heavily. I thought I was relieving tension but in actuality it was only temporarily. As soon as one fix was over I needed another one right away. Slowly it started to affect my health. I was pretty active before smoking. I used to surf and skate quite often. After awhile those activities got harder and harder until I stop doing those activities altogether. After my buddies left I still smoked. Maybe not as often, but enough to go out and buy smokes regularly. I guess I can't say that these effects were realized until I quit. While you're smoking you get into a state that is bad, but not bad enough for you to tell there's something wrong. I think that was the danger all along. It's like a pain that's dull and there all the time. It hurts, but not bad enough for you to go to the hospital. Smoking was slowly hurting me, but not bad enough to make me want to quit. But when you try

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Page 21 - UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. California Health Information Survey, 2001.

to quit, that's when the hurt comes. Nicotine withdrawals can bring on some pretty bad headaches. A couple times I had cold sweats and fevers. I think I'd tried to quit about half a dozen times. Finally I quit cold turkey about three years ago. The trade off for me was that I gained thirty pounds! I'm still trying to shed some of that weight. But there was a major difference in how I felt after only a few weeks after I quit. I wasn't feeling tired all the time and it was easier to take full breaths. Some effects that I suspect were due to smoking were the loss of some taste and smell. I'll never really be sure if it was the smoking or just me getting a little older. So, you can say smoking may have robbed the truth from me. All in all, I'm very happy I quit. It's not only the health dangers that should be of concern but also the mental anguish that comes with it. My case may not be as extreme as most people, but I hope it helps.

DID YOU KNOW?

Data from the 2003 Exploration of Tobacco Use Among Asian American and Pacific Islander Youth Report, indicated that many Vietnamese youth (age 13-22) feel that they are desensitized to smoking because television and movies are inundated with smoking scenes.

The saying goes, “I wish I would have known then what I know now.” With technology getting better every year, in the past seems so simple and easy going. This is the story of me when I was younger. I fell in love with this man regardless of flaws, not knowing that one day that it would kill me. At a young age, I chose not to smoke, it was never appealing to me, but my husband for thirty years had been smoking ever since I’ve known him. As long as he was not smoking around me in the house or kept some distance while we were outside together, it was fine with me. He never blew smoke in my face directly, so I did not believe it affected me. One day while going to a check up appointment, my doctor asked me how long I have had a cough. I told him I get it every now and then, but it was not too serious. He asked several questions, but one only applied to me. “Does anyone smoke in your house?” he asked. “My husband but not directly around me,” I replied. The doctor wanted me to make another appointment to do some further test to see if I was affected with secondhand smoke. Knowing that my husband was okay and he had been smoking ever since I’ve known him, I did not think anything would be wrong with me. Before the month had ended I was diagnosed with cancer, from secondhand smoke. Who would have thought? It just goes to show how things can creep up on you without you even noticing it. Because of my old age, it would be hard for me to fight it, but at least I have reached one person with my story if not with anyone else, because now my husband has quit smoking, it’s better late than never. “I wish I would have known.”

People think that quitting smoking is very hard to do. In fact, it may be the hardest thing in your life to do. But if you can, it will be the best thing you do for yourself and for your family, friends, neighbors – your community. This is because it is going to make you happy and sets an example for others. My quitting happened under the most amazing circumstances. A forest monk was visiting and I met him at the airport. Upon meeting him, he gave me a blessing – he “blew air” on my head. When I came home, I could not help feeling that I had to throw my ashtray away. And since that day, I never could go back to smoking. This is an amazing, true occurrence in my life.



Sample of the “No Smoking” sign at the Wat Thai Temple in North Hollywood, CA

I still remember when I first saw my sister smoking a cigarette. I was in the lunch area in middle school and a friend tapped me on the shoulder and pointed to my sister, who was across the yard. She said, "Oooh, your sister is smoking." I turned and saw my sister standing with her group of friends, acting cool, and puffing on a cigarette. I remember thinking, "Boy, will my parents be mad if I tell on her." Trying to be cool myself, I told my friend that I knew about it and asked her what was wrong with smoking. I did not tell on my sister to my parents and now I believe that is one injustice I made to my sister.

My sister's smoking continued throughout high school and then college. She is so hooked on it that she was smoking a pack a day for a while. I believe her habit started my older sister to try out cigarettes and it also encouraged my younger brother's smoking habit. It is difficult for me to tell them not to smoke, but seeing how often they have to have nicotine after a meal really worries me. I had told them about the harm of smoking and explained to them that this habit is hard to break. Unfortunately, they don't believe me and told me that they can stop smoking anytime they want to. Right now, they just don't feel like it. I don't see how smoking makes them feel cool, but it does. And I know that they are hurting their health. The funny thing about smoking is that my sister and brother surround themselves with smokers, too. I guess it is just another device to belong with a group.

Now that I have a niece, I don't know if she will believe me when I tell her not to smoke. Seeing that her own aunt and uncle do, she may never believe that smoking will harm her.

No parent ever wants their Hmong children get addicted to smoking (cigarettes and opium). If you smoke, you are the failure in the family. People will regard you as "poor and filthy." Have I heard enough from my parent about smoking or drugs? Personally I tune out after these initial remarks, so the message must have been right up front for me at the early age. With the same message, I thought that every parent must tell their children that smoking cigarettes is unacceptable in the family. If adolescents don't fear the well-known shame and health hazards of using tobacco, what aspects of smoking are most likely to get their attention? Things that I never told my friend is that smoking can make them less physically attractive to me, but I still never tell them directly. Unfortunately, I have very few friends that smoke and those who start smoking have some psychological effect in our friendship. In fact, some them try to stop unsuccessfully at least a few times while we are still in a close family ties. They really don't have to be addict to get into the mainstream media of glamorous.

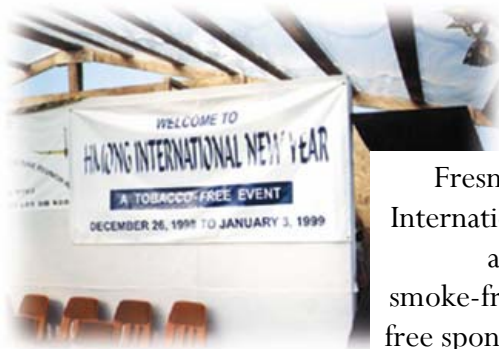
DID YOU KNOW?

In the Hmong community, tobacco is used in wedding ceremonies, in healing/calling rituals, as guest offerings, as medicine, and in funerals.

Merced's Hmong New Year Committee adopted a tobacco-free sponsorship policy in 2003.

Tsi muaj cov namtxiv kw xaam kua Moob tej mivnyuas quav yeeb (luam yeeb hab yaajyeeb). Yog koj hau yeeb tes koj yog ib tug neeg tsis muaj nqe nyob huv tsev tuab neeg. Yog koj haus luam yeeb tes lwm tug yuav saiv koj le kw tuab neeg pluag hab qa heev. Kuv puas tau nov txaus has txug kev qhuab qha ntawm namtxiv has txug kev haus luam yeem? Nyob ntawm kuv tug kheej yug xyum tau cov ntsab lug nuav zoo, yeej yog cov lug muaj nqe tsua yug yaav ntxuv thaum yug tseem yaus. Siv tuab cov nrab lug, xaav tas txua tug namtxiv yuav qha tsua puab cov mivnyuas tas haus luam yeeb yuav yuav tsi tau nyob huv tsev tuab neeg. Yog tas cov hluas tsi ntshai txuj kev txaa muag hab kev mob nkeeg, tshuav dlaab tsi txaj yuav ua rua kuas puab tsaag dleev? Tej yaam kw kuv tsi has rua kuv cov phooj ywg yog haus luam yeeb ua rua kuv tsi xaav txaav ti puab, tab si has tsi taug ncaaj nraiv rua puab. Moov tsi muaj kuv muaj cov phooj ywg haus luam yeeb ua tau tej yaam tsi zoo ruas peb txuj kev phooj ywg. Qhov tseeb tag puab yeej xyum txav luam yeeb txuaj lub sib haum peb tseem noj nyob uas ke. Tsi taag tas puaj yuav haus luam yeeb es puas txaj zoo nkauj zoo nraug les phaib ej.

Growing up, my dad was an avid smoker. What I would remember most is when he would come home with a stench of rancid smoke and tobacco. Whenever there were family parties, it seemed proper for all the uncles to be smoking and drinking while playing a friendly game of mahjong or cards. This is the environment I was exposed to from about the age of four through my adolescent years. High school was another world of experimentation. At the age of 12, even after the D.A.R.E. program was held in school, my peers were in the stage of rebellion, which included smoking. I can still recall the days when smoking was allowed in restaurants. From then on, it was never a surprise to see anyone smoking, young or old. I am now 21 years old, soon to be 22 and I had never smoked nor have I tried. Some of my peers are surprised by this fact since half of them are smokers and the other half have tried smoking and are not smokers. When others ask me why I don't smoke, I honestly do not know why. Come to think about it, I have no real reason to. Some smoke to relieve stress. I sleep to relieve stress. Some people smoke socially. I talk to people to be social. Some smoke for the experience. I believe that when chosen personally, life experiences should be positive aspects. Some smoke because they are addicted. I believe that addiction is about self control. I don't look at others differently for smoking, and I don't mind when others smoke around me. But as long as I'm satisfied and contented with my lifestyle and my life choices, why would I smoke?



Fresno's Hmong International New Year adopted smoke-free and tobacco free sponsorship policies in 1998.

My grandfather was the head of our family. He'd smoke as long as I can remember. Each cigarette made him weaker and weaker, and the tobacco company is at fault. How can someone make a profit on killing my loved one? I was so hurt when he passed that I couldn't express myself, but that's when I wrote this.

All I hear are lies surrounded by dark ties.
 Tobacco telling me to smoke and never die.
 The risk is high.
 But still they advertise.
 Wondering why they sell to those they despise.
 They don't love us, but they need us.
 So, they tell us what to do.
 So, they try to lead us to the path which is death.
 Man, they murdering you.
 Not only killing you, but killing your family, too.
 Oh, so true, man.
 Does the truth hurt?
 Fool, you look broke with your free Marlboro t-shirt.
 It ain't Kool how you living.
 I heard how your aunt coughed up half her lung at Thanksgiving.
 Philip Morris giving money to the youth groups.
 Here's a pack. There's a pack.
 Killing most of our youth.
 Thank you, for deceiving the world.
 Hide it with charity...what about the dying boys and girls.

My name is Thomas Makiphie. I am from Ebon, Likeip, Jaluit, and Mejit in the Marshall Islands.

On this day, June 27, 2004, I am happy to tell you the story of my life. I started to smoke tobacco when I was twelve years old. I thought it was something cool to do because my friends were doing it. I did not know that it was ruining my body.

As I look back, I was not healthy. As I smoked more, I noticed that my body and mind were weaker. There were many days that all I did was smoke and not eat. I could go without food for the whole day. Almost all the times my kids would get sick, respiratory problems, and I did not know that they were sick because of secondhand smoke. Not only my kids had problems, but I also had respiratory problems.

It was due to my addiction to tobacco that my body became very weak. I was so weak that I was hospitalized at Hoag Hospital, Newport Beach, CA, in August 2003. It was found that my heart was too weak because nine of the blood vessels in my heart were clogged. The doctor did the bypass, they took nine blood vessels from my leg and used them in my heart to help me breath better. I was in the hospital for one week.

After the surgery, the doctor told me that if I wanted to live longer, I should quit smoking. I was 56 years old when I stopped smoking. I smoked for 44 years. It was very difficult for me to quit smoking. The first few days, I was very moody. It was very hard for my family, too. I came to realize that I must stop smoking. It was something that I need to do, so I went "cold turkey." I want to thank my children for supporting me during my difficult time, my friends for their prayers, and especially God for his grace and safekeeping.

I would like to say something to anybody that is thinking or wanting to start smoking. Smoking does not do any good thing to you and your body. It is a waste of money. It ruins your life and those you love the most.

Eta in Thomas Makiphie. Ña ij juõn emman in Ebon, Likiep, Jaluit, im Mejit ilo ailõn in Marshall Islands.

Ilo rainin, June 27, 2004, imõnõnõ in inaj bwebwenato kin mour e aõ. Na iar jino aõ kōbatat jikka ke ej joñoul ruo (12) aõ iiõ. Iar likiti ejj juõn men emõn kinke ij lo an ro jet mōtta bar kōbatat. Iar jab jela ke kōbatat ear kakure enbwinu.

Ilo aõ reilik lok im lale wawen aõ kar mour, iar jab juõn eo ejmour. Ke ej to lok wõt aõ kōbatat iar jino in eñjake ke iar jab juõn eo ejmour. Elõñ ien ij jab mōña iumin juõn ran ak kōbatat wõt. Aolep ien ajri ro neju rej bōk mejin, iar jab jela ke nañinmij eo air rej itok jen aõ kōbatat itutier. Ejab ajri wõt neju im nañinmij ak bar na.

Kin ao kar addicted ñõn jikka. Enbwinu ear jino in mōjno lok mae ien eo im iar derloñ ilo Hoag Hospital ilo Newport Beach, California, ilo August 2003. Ke iar dreloñar lo bwe menono eo aõ ejab emõn an jerbal. Rar lo bwe ial in bōtōktōk ko ilo menono e aõ emōj air aidik lok im bōtōktōk ejab maroñ in itotak ie. Rar kōmane men eo im rej na etan “bypass,” ewōr tarin 9 eke ko im rar bon, kinmenin rar bōk jet eke jen neo im kiji ilo menono e aõ bwe in maroñ in emõn aõ emenono.

Ke ej mōj aõ mwijmwij, doctor eo aõ ear ba bwe elañe ikōnan bwe en aitoklol aõ mour ij aikuj in jolok jikka. Lemñoul jiljino (56) aõ iiõ ke ij jolok aõ kōbatat. Iar kōbatat iumin eñuoul emen (44) iiõ. Ear lukkun in bin aõ jolok jikka kinke elap aõ kar addicted ñõne. Kei j jino jolok aõ kōbatat, iar bed ilo juõn stage eo im jej na etan “moody,” emōkaj aõ illulu. Ear juõn ien eo ebin ñõn ro nuku im ro raorōk iba bareinwõt. Kinke ij kile iba make ke ej juõn men iar aikuj in kōmane, iar jolok jikka “cold turkey.” Ikōnan kamolol ajri ro neju kin air kar jibañ iõ ilo ien eo ebin ñõn ña, ro mōtta im rar kememej iõ ilo jar ko air, elap tata ij kamolol Anij kin jouj im kejjbarok eo an.

Aõ nan ñõn ro im rej lemnak in kōbatat. Kōbatat ej juõn men eo im ejelok tokjen ñõn mour eo am, ej waste of money, im ej kakure mour eo am, im ro elap air aorōk ibam.

I knew of a man, who was fairly young,
He was 5 feet 6 and very fun.

When I look at him,
It saddens me, to see what he's becoming in front of me.
I always wonder, how could this be?

The darkness of his skin, the frail look in his face,
The yellowish teeth and dry lips that appear on his face.

His coughing, his wheezing, the shortness of his breath,
“Uncle, Uncle, let's not stop, we'll play come more till we want to stop.”

I knew of a man, who was fairly young,
If he only knew what he has done.

The doctors said he will go soon
From what is called a big tumor wound.

His smoking, his drinking, it's just not fun.

Now he knows, but it's too late.
What can we do but to leave it up to fate,

I knew of a man, who was fairly young,
How I missed him now and I'll miss him then.

I remember my dad as a handsome man who was strong, athletic, and who always had a cigarette in his hand and a pack of Lucky Strikes in his shirt pocket. It's funny. I don't remember my dad ever putting the cigarette in his mouth - it was always in his hand.

I was 15 when my dad was diagnosed with cancer. He was 44 years old and was told that he had carcinoma of the nasopharynx. His prognosis was bad. Cobalt radiation treatments, three times a week and less than six months to live.

I remember asking the doctors how did my dad get cancer. Was it from cigarettes? They all said no to me. The internist, the surgeon, the oncologist, and the cancer review panel, they all said no. Not by cigarettes, they all repeated to me and on their desks and conference tables were ashtrays filled with cigarette butts and empty Lucky Strikes cigarette packs. This memory is forever etched in my mind.

From that day on, I knew better and attribute my dad's cancer to cigarette smoking. I remember having long discussions with my dad about the hazards of tobacco use as I drove him to his cobalt treatments and doctors' appointments. I remember him finally telling me that perhaps I was right, but it was too late for him and we would never find out.

The good news is that since quitting, I have lost 70 lbs., have not suffered from any respiratory illness EVER SINCE I quit, and am now, overall, a genuinely healthy individual. It's interesting all the other unhealthy things in life that are related to smoking. I don't miss the lingering smell of smoke, the dizziness from lack of oxygen to my body, the morning coughs, the year long sicknesses, and any other habit that accompanied my expensive habit.

Two years ago, I lost a close relative to lung cancer, who I might add had already been quit for several years when he was diagnosed and ultimately passed away. Stories of loss continue to flood my life....

I am grateful for everyday that my Dad and I conquer smoke free. Everyday, a little less of a challenge and so much more added to my life. This is the new Me.

DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly all women who smoke started as teenagers. As immigrant women assimilate into American culture, they become more vulnerable to advertising messages and are at an increased risk for smoking.

In 1999, Virginia Slims released ads featuring a young Asian woman in traditional makeup and dress portraying Asian women as mysterious and exotic creatures.

I am proud to say that I am 5 years quit, or as I like to address it, 5 years strong and counting. I am a 29 year old Filipina and I am tobacco free...

My memories and struggles are still so fresh. My first cigarette at 14, my “who knows what number” at 24, the first time me and Pop smoked together, my first time in the emergency room with pneumonia, the first time I watched someone die from lung cancer..... Smoking has affected my life physically, mentally, and emotionally. Up to 5 years ago, I was smoking two packs a day of Newports, what some consider the worst of cigarettes. I was a frequent flyer in the Emergency Room with my constant bouts of bronchitis and horrific incidents of pneumonia. Physically, I was out of shape, sickly, and, in general, lived an unhealthy lifestyle.

It might have been a brick that knocked my head straight the day I decided to quit smoking. My Dad had already been quit a year and I kept promising him that when I was ready I’d let him know. It was time. I had tried to quit a million times before – for my parents, my friends, my partners, my New Year’s resolution, etc. etc. etc. – but this time it was for me, on my own time, for my own good.

My recovery from smoking all of those years has been rewarding, but still difficult. It’s only in the past two years that I have not felt that tightness in my chest after climbing a flight of stairs, running a short path, or just plain cardio work. My lung capacity still suffers, and I fear that it will never fully heal. Unfortunately, there are so many more of my friends and family that are still lighting up at every opportunity.

My dad surprised all his doctors and lived five years longer than expected. He weathered the cobalt treatments and got better. I honestly thought he was going to beat the cancer, but in early 1970s, his cancer spread. He had more cobalt treatments and within a few months, my dad had become emaciated, lost the use of his vocal cords, and morphine couldn’t control his pain.

On Saturday, June 20, 1970, I saw my dad for the last time. He was in the hospital. As I said my good byes to him, he handed me a scratch piece of paper. He had written, “Don’t ever smoke.”

My dad died a few hours later. It was Father’s Day, June 21, 1970.

DID YOU KNOW?

Guam has the second highest smoking prevalence among all U.S. states and territories at 32%.

These Chamorro organizations have adopted tobacco-free and alcohol-free sponsorship policies:

- ☞ Guam Communications Network
- ☞ I Famalao’an
- ☞ Inetnon’nia
- ☞ Kutturán Chamoru Performers

In the summer of 1988, I met a low-income family with six children, four girls and two boys. The oldest child was 12 years old, and the youngest was one-month old with asthma. The family depended on government assistance (AFDC). They lived in a two bedroom, one bath home (850 square feet). The head of the household did not do anything besides drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes and marijuana. He drank and smoked around the children seven days a week. His wife was very depressed and frustrated about his activities around the children. She told him to smoke outside of the house, but he never listened, so she became very angry and yelled at him days and nights before bedtime.

As a result of his activities, the oldest son at the age of 16 ended up following in his father's footsteps. He did not attend school, would steal his dad's cigarettes, and drink his dad's alcohol daily. The middle child was unhealthy and had lung and heart problems and a learning disability. The youngest child with asthma was in the hospital constantly.

As a consequence of his action, his wife made arrangements to move out of state with children in 1992. He couldn't keep up with his vices, had no one to turn to and no money to pay for the rent. He didn't find any reason to live, and therefore, he decided to end his life by hanging himself.

I am a Samoan female in High school. Everybody says cigarettes are bad. Of course, everybody knows right? Not at my church. What I don't like are the people who smoke and don't realize that they are putting other people in harm's way. Now these are church-going people and I'm sure that they don't mean to put us in harm's way. It's just funny that they tell us that smoking is bad and yet they still do it, and in front of us. What's even more sad is when parents smoke in front of their infants. I play with them just to get them away from the smoke. I wish I could say something to the parents, but dare I tell an adult what to do. I will get slapped silly in front of everyone. I just want to wake people up who think that tobacco education is a lost cause in the Samoan community. Education has to start somewhere and I am a result of it. I got to go to an anti-tobacco retreat just for Pacific Islander youth. That was tobacco education given in "our ways" (Islander). I am tired of losing people from my family/church/community to preventable death. I know that it will be an uphill battle in my community but I think that saving lives is worth it.

DID YOU KNOW?

In California the following Pacific Islander churches have a smoke-free church grounds policy:

- ☞ First Congregational Church of National City
- ☞ First Congregational Church of San Diego
- ☞ Ola Mo Keriso
- ☞ Tautua Samoa of North County San Diego

My father quit smoking because of me. I was eight when he took me to an amusement park. He was walking ahead of me, smoking. I ran through the crowd to catch up with him. As I got close, ashes from his lit cigarette flew into my eye. They burned, but I did not cry, just covered my eye in shock. Looking back, my father saw that I had stopped. He came up to me.

“What is wrong?” he asked.

“Your cigarette! It got in my eye!”

I did not have to look at him to know he was feeling very bad. He led me to the restroom, where I washed my eye with cold water. I went back to my father, a little angry at his carelessness. “I could’ve been blinded!” I told him.

He has not smoked since. “Cigarettes are so bad,” he said. “How could I forget that someone else hurt you with a cigarette? When you were 3, a boy came up to you and burned his cigarette on your back. I got so upset. Daddy is sorry. Daddy won’t smoke again.”

As a kid, it felt great that my dad would give up something, just for me.

Smoking has affected my family by taking away my grandfather. For 23 years, he had fought against cancer, and it took a toll on our family to watch him suffer with the pain. From the once active Grandpa we knew as children to the Grandpa that didn’t have strength as he sat in his recliner. It had a major effect on me because I spent his last weeks helping and taking care of him while he was heavily medicated and deeply in pain. He was literally helpless and the cancer spread widely throughout his body during his 23 year battle. The thing that really hurt was watching him continue to smoke pack after pack. As it worsened, the disease destroyed the organs inside his flesh. And I can remember the day that he passed on at Sharp Hospital, March 2000. We saw him there with machines attached to his body, and not responding to our cries. The pain I felt looking at my mother and grandmother crying! My little sister was only five and she won’t have him through life like we did. I even have a little brother now that will have never met him or seen him.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1993, lung cancer was the leading cause of cancer death among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

With the passing of my uncle I saw a part of my culture disappearing with him. He was my aunt's husband, an in-law to most people beyond our family unit but to my siblings and I, he was a surrogate father. A nurturing man with charisma and a sense of humor that was anything but dry. His only foible was the one thing he could not give up even if it cost him his life, smoking. He smoked often, too often for anyone to count. I can still smell that unforgettable odor of loose tobacco on his clothes and in his car, a smell that I became addicted to as a child. He used to roll his own cigarettes, they were as flawless and addictive as mother's egg rolls.

He was aware that smoking was a dangerous substance, he learned that from his predecessors, but thirty years of habit was something that was hard to lose. Quitting successfully meant that he would have to stop socializing with all the male members in my family who smoked. Smoking is like a disease that spreads from generation to generation. The addiction is strong, stronger than the fear of death.

Six years ago he suffered a heart attack and was diagnosed with diabetes not too long after that. His weight dropped from one hundred and sixty pounds to a hundred pounds within the span of three months. He had to quit smoking when his health began to decline but it was too late to recover the damage that had already been done- he had a stroke two years after the heart attack, which left him paralyzed until his death.

In the hospital, I learned of his permanent brain damage; the doctors told us that he would not be able to understand or react

If your child smokes, you should make sure to explain in a non-threatening way why it's wrong instead of yelling and screaming at them. If you arm your children with the ability to reason, they will eventually understand why smoking is problematic.

I am smoke free today and much happier for it. I was always a very good athlete, but recently I have become a better athlete. I run at least four times a week, bike and hike on the weekends and just get to breathe easily no matter what it is I am doing.

DID YOU KNOW?

Almost 71% of Iranian male smokers reported their first smoking experience was between the ages of 13 and 24 years, while for Iranian female smokers (56%), this was after the age of 18 years.

The prevalence of smoking increased from 1994 to 2000 for Iranian men (26% to 29%) and Iranian women (1.4% to 5.3%), especially young people.

Iran had the highest mortality rate from both upper (lip, oral cavity, and pharynx) and lower (trachea, lung, and bronchus) respiratory tract cancers in 1999 among studied countries by the World Health Organization.

I used to hate it. The smell of it made me sick. Until this day it reminds of my father. He would smoke while he drank. I remember thinking that I will never be a smoker. I thought it was disgusting.

I moved to the U.S. from Iran when I was 14 years old. In high school, I had started drinking and smoking occasionally but nothing serious, everyone was doing it at the time. Or so I thought. Things started getting worse when I went to college. All my pent up anger and resentment came out. I didn't smoke just at parties- I had become a habitual smoker.

It's very strange writing about my smoking, as it is a behavior that I don't engage in anymore. Just thinking about my smoking days makes me feel queasy. I quit a while ago mostly because I got very sick. I was struggling with shortness of breath and depression. It wasn't until I stopped that I realized how much of my self-worth was dependent on how I saw myself and how seeing myself as a smoker made me feel worse. Politically, I felt that I didn't want to promote Phillip Morris's active campaign of trying to engage youth of color to smoke.

I think for many of us smoking started out as a fun, independent thing. It was our way as young Asians to rebel against our parents or show our peers how courageous we were. I think the reason I smoked were all of the above. I was never taught about the adverse effects of smoking, instead I was scared into it. I would get yelled at or grounded if caught with cigarettes. If there is one thing I would tell parents today, it would be for them to keep the lines of communication with their kids open.

to anyone. It was painful to see him on his hospital bed with nothing to say but tears to speak. He looked fragile, his face had seen the years of smoking. At times, I can still see the smoke from his cigarette dissipating in the air, each time, taking a little bit of him with it. It was difficult to deal with the loss of someone but even more difficult to witness their suffering. Needless to say, my family and I did not give up on him. Despite our culture's unwillingness to display affection, we held him and kissed him to no end. We buried him a year ago.



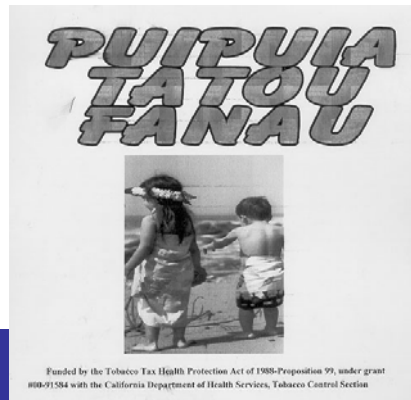
Marlboro promotional items in Vietnam

DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly 17% of all Asian American and Pacific Islander adults smoke, however, according to the California Health Information Survey, the smoking rate among Vietnamese males in California is 31.5%.

I think smoking is bad for our community, because it can give you cancer, lung infection and mouth cancer. If people bring cigars, cigarettes, and tobacco it can harm children and guns can be involved and if people hate smoking and it goes around then our population will decrease, and that's why I don't want people to have secondhand smoking.

Sample of Samoan church fans with the message "Protect Our Youth" utilized in APITEN San Diego Regional Campaign



DID YOU KNOW?

Among Pacific Islander males, smoking rates are as high as 65% for Tongans, 59% for Palauans, 55% for Fijians, 53% for Chuukese, 53% for Samoans, 46% for Papa New Guinea, and 42% for Native Hawaiians.

Among Pacific Islander females, smoking rates are as high as 28% for Papa New Guinea, 22% for Fijians, 19% for Samoans, 14% for Tongans, and 11% for Chuukese.

“Can I light it?” I asked my father.

“O, sige,” (Tagalog for Oh, go ahead) he said.

I watched excitedly as he handed me the shiny metal lighter. I always love the “clink” sound it made when you opened the top. Smiling proudly, my father handed me the cigarette. Fumbling for a minute, my little thumb made an attempt to spark the flint within the case. In a flash, the flare of a bluish orange flame ignited. There was a faint hint of kerosene as I drew the lighter closer to the tip of the cigarette, which sat between my lips. Taking a quick puff, I could see the white paper ignite black and wisps of smoke floated into the air. Smiling as if accomplishing a significant task of manhood, I handed my father back the cigarette and blew the smoke out of my mouth as I had seen him do on many occasions. This was indeed a bonding moment. At other times, I would ask him to blow out the smoke so I could simply inhale it. There was something about a freshly lit cigarette that I loved...I was only 10.

DID YOU KNOW?

The number of Asian American smokers increases seven-fold from middle school to high school. In addition, smoking prevalence increases dramatically among Asians from 6th grade to 12th grade, at a rate much steeper than any other ethnic group.

Smoking ain't all that! I don't smoke, but I have friends who do. I even have friends who just started. It's sad to see how they really think it is cool. First of all, it stinks, and it bothers others who don't smoke. I used to think that it is okay if they choose to smoke, as long as they do it away from me. Well, I would not be a good friend if I let them do that. I know that it is going to cause them health problems down the road. I wish it was easy for them to quit. It is really addictive because they all say it is hard to quit. I am afraid of how my friends' lives will turn out in the future. I've been to quite a few funerals. It is sad to say the common thing among all of them is that they all smoked. Now I ask those who smoke and looking to start smoking, it really isn't all that cool when you cheat yourself of living a healthy life, when you cough up crap, when you stroll around with an oxygen tank, and especially when your family and friends are crying at your funeral. It is easy to do the wrong things in life, the challenge is to do the right things in life.

Love,

T-Lo

DID YOU KNOW?

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Samoa. One out of every four Samoan men with cancer has lung cancer.

It was a typical college day. I had lunch with my boyfriend and then headed off to class. Right before my class started, I received a page with "911" on it. I immediately called my mother, who was at my grandparents' house. She could not talk, so my cousin took the phone from her and said, "Grandpa took his last breath." My eyes teared up so heavily, that I could not return to class. I paged my boyfriend and he met me under the library stairs. I cried on his chest and could not believe what I had heard. He told me that it would be okay and that we should go to my grandparents' house immediately.

I later learned that my Lolo Juanito smoked since he was about 12 years old. He joined the military and fought in various wars. He and my Lola Liwanag had nine children, most of who were born in the Philippines, but grew up in America. Their original home in California had three bedrooms and two bathrooms. Every time we went to their house, it was always full of smoke, but it did not seem to bother anybody. He sat in the same leather chair and smoked packs of cigarettes each day. He had the same ashtray- something he brought over from the Philippines.

It was more than fifty years that my Lolo smoke cigarettes. It was only a couple of months after he was diagnosed with cancer that he passed away. He went through chemotherapy and the "whole nine yards." He was in and out of hospice care. The whole family just watched as he deteriorated every day. In the end, he passed away in the house that all of his children grew up in...the house that we gathered at on every occasion... the house that still, to this day, carries the old ashtray that once sat right next to him for his deadly habit.

Dear Mr. Tobacco Maker,

434,000 Americans die each year, and yeah, it's because of you.

Out of this number, there's one I remember, who really impacted my life. Bitter sweet sorrows for today and tomorrow for he had witnessed the light. Two packs a day keep your pockets paid but no, you wanted some more. Addiction had struck, you don't care enough, so suffering he had to endure.

The cancer had spread from his lungs to his head so fast, that I felt his pain. Stroke after stroke, I never lost hope, but these feelings I couldn't maintain. Paralyzed on one side, on his death bed he lied. It aches so unbearably inside.

How could you have done this to this person I miss? How could you have just let him die?

He puffed, he puffed, he passed...away, to a better place now. At least he is safe now, I still feel him somehow. So to you, cancer giver, you owe me a favor. So join me in this prayer, I offer to my father:

My grandpa died due to many years of smoking. He started smoking when he was in his teens and never stopped. He was already having complications with his heart and that's why he was having bad chest pains. It's because of my Tatay's death that I would never touch a cigarette. My dad is a smoker, too, and every day when I see him smoke, I remind him of Tatay, his dad, and why he died at such a young age. Tatay died in his 50's and never got to see his grandchildren graduate from college, or even high school. My dad has tried quitting, but after a couple of years, he would go back to smoking. As a result of my grandpa's death, my siblings and I do not smoke and refuse to buy him cigarettes when he asks us to get him some. I hope one day he will finally quit smoking for good because I do want to him to watch his grandchildren grow up.

DID YOU KNOW?

These Filipino organizations have adopted tobacco-free sponsorship policies:

- ☞ Filipino American Social Services
- ☞ Filipino Health Advocacy Network
- ☞ Filipino Task Force on AIDS
- ☞ Pilipino Workers' Center
- ☞ Likha Pilipino Folk Ensemble
- ☞ Filipino Ugnayan Student Organization
- ☞ Pagkakaisa

I remember the last time I saw my grandpa, or “Tatay” as we called him, alive and healthy was the day after Christmas in 1993. He was craving for some burgers, so my dad and I got some for him. I don’t remember exactly what, but I know he was so happy that we bought him some. The next day he was admitted to the hospital because he was complaining of bad chest pains. He was in and out of the hospital for a couple of months because of his chest pains. During those months, he was forced to move back into our place with my grandma just so someone could watch over him all the time.

Tatay was admitted to the hospital that night and never left the hospital alive. He was in the hospital for a little bit over a month. I remember one night in the waiting room, my dad asked my older cousin and I to come with him. My grandpa wanted to go see us. I was happy that I was going to see him and finally talk to him after how many weeks of not talking to him. But the sight that I saw next was unbearable for me to stand. I walked in the room and I remember not wanting to get near him. Tatay had all these tubes attached to him. He could barely talk and all he could do was groan and make sounds that I couldn’t make out. I saw tears in his eyes. My dad wanted me to give him a hug. He looked so frail that I didn’t want to hug him, let alone touch him. But I did and once I did, I said “I love you” to him and ran out of the room. I didn’t know that was the last time I would ever talk to him.

A couple weeks later my grandpa died. I was devastated when I heard the news. I was so close to him. I remember in elementary he would pick me up from school and take me out to eat. This was our ritual, OUR ALONE and QUALITY TIME together. Those are the days that I miss!

My Father,
Who are in heaven,
Cancer be thy name.
The time has come,
Thy pain is done,
On earth,
For you’re now in heaven.

You gave me this day,
My every breath,
And even though you took your last,
I still forgive you for how you passed before us.
And lead me not into your temptation,
But deliver me from this evil.

Cynically signed,
Your victim’s son

DID YOU KNOW?

1 out of 4 Asian American and Pacific Islander men are smokers. According to the California Health Interview Survey conducted in 2001, 23.7% of Filipino men smoke.

My father had always known that smoking is bad. He often had said that if he ever caught us smoking that we would be in “big trouble.” Well, after his passing in 2001, my family found out the hard way what “big trouble” meant. His doctor, a long time family friend told us what my dad had to endure the last years of his life. My family knew that our father had hypertension and that eventually caused a stroke that ended his life. We also found out that my father, who was a father to 14 children and a grandfather to 24 of my nieces and nephews, was impotent for the last four years. My mother at first did not understand it completely, she always thought that he had been seeing other women and had kept a mistress. The secret led to the degeneration of their marriage and created tension among our family. We often sided with our mom and at countless occasions had asked her to move out with us.

You might ask why he kept the secret. The answer is that my father was a leader in the community’s eyes. In his home country of Laos, he was a village leader who was taught by his father, who was also a village leader, to always show strength and command respect. It was also his father who gave him his first smoke at age 12, from a sacred pipe. Being a village leader also meant that he was also the healer and throughout his life, people would come to him to get various ailments treated. One of the treatment methods was chanting and blowing tobacco smoke on the afflicted areas of the body. Being a healer in the community meant that he saw no reason to quit and did not try to quit smoking until his doctor had told him that he had to. By then, it was too late and his body had already shown the effect of the poisons that he had been inhaling for over 40 years.

I never wanted people to know what happened to my father because it was such an embarrassing subject for him. But as more and more of his long time friends pass away, often from the same tobacco related disease, I feel that my father’s story will help people become aware of what can happen to those who do smoke and do not quit. After all, if tobacco can cause the death of someone who was a symbol of strength and good health in the community, then it can definitely harm all of the Lao community.

DID YOU KNOW?

Local studies have shown an alarming smoking prevalence of 48-72% for adult Laotian males.

Fresno’s Lao New Year adopted smoke-free, alcohol-free, and tobacco-free sponsorship policies in 2003.

These Lao organizations have adopted tobacco-free sponsorship policies:

- ☞ Lao Family Community Development, Inc.
- ☞ Grace Lao Lutheran Church
- ☞ Lao Khmu-American Community of the Bay Area
- ☞ Lao Vietnam War Veterans Club, Inc.